

Inside Account by a Member of the Commission – Putting Together the Evidence – Nailing Rumors of a Conspiracy – Mother's Myth: Oswald Was a Paid U. S. Agent – Conclusion: One Rifle and One Rifleman

by Congressman Gerald R. Ford

[published in "Life" Magazine, Oct. 2, 1964]

Note by Edmund C. Berkeley, Editor: Following is a report by Gerald R. Ford, published in "Life" Magazine, October 2, 1964, member of the Warren Commission, then Congressman from Michigan, and now President of the United States. It contains a number of statements that are not true, and at least one lie. Many of the untrue statements are attributable to lies told by the FBI and the CIA to the Warren Commission. But there was a top secret meeting of the Warren Commission on January 20, 1964, at which Attorney General Waggoner Carr of Texas presented to the Warren Commission a large amount of evidence that Lee Harvey Oswald was an informer for and agent for the FBI, and the Warren Commission decided to ignore all this information. So at least the last statement by Gerald R. Ford in this article for "Life" is false: "This report is the truth as we see it, as best we know it, and on this we rest." Ford knew better.

This report was published by "Life" Magazine in at least two different versions, and perhaps six different versions. The changes made while the article was on press cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. Who paid for the changes? Why does "the truth" require so many alterations?

Publication of this article is due to Roger Katz of Mason City, Iowa; his help is gratefully acknowledged.

The author, Republican representative from Michigan's 5th District, is writing a book on his 10 months with the Warren Commission.

The most important witness to appear before the Warren Commission in the 10 months we sat was a neat, Bible-reading steam fitter from Dallas. His name was H. L. Brennan and he had seen Lee Harvey Oswald thrust a rifle from a sixth-floor window of the Texas School Book Depository and shoot the President of the United States.

In the shock and turmoil that followed, Brennan had headed for a policeman and given him a description of the man he had seen in the window. The police sent out a "wanted" bulletin based on that description. Within the hour police routinely learned that a Depository employee, Lee Oswald, was missing. By this time Oswald was already in custody for the murder of Officer J.D. Tippit. Tippit

had heard the bulletin and spotted Oswald, who had shot him on the spot. As police prepared to pick up the missing Depository employee — Oswald — they suddenly realized that he and the suspect in the Tippit shooting were one and the same. Though Brennan later identified Oswald, his first description — gathered hastily from 120 feet — naturally varied from Oswald's actual appearance. It probably was this discrepancy which set off the first of the countless rumors on the President's assassination: that more than one man was involved. Thus, both here and abroad began the cascade of innuendo, supposition, imagination, twisted fact, and downright fantasy that surrounded the tragic death of John Fitzgerald Kennedy.

Nonetheless, the basic story of the assassination that emerged in the first few weeks was never materially altered during the commission's investigation. There were no startling developments, no sudden turns of evidence or testimony that opened up truths previously unperceived.

After taking millions of words of testimony from hundreds upon hundreds of witnesses, the Warren Commission has established that there is not a scintilla of credible evidence to suggest a conspiracy to kill President Kennedy. The evidence is clear and overwhelming: Lee Harvey Oswald did it.

There is no evidence of a second man, of other shots, of other guns.

There is no evidence to suggest that Oswald went to work at the Depository for the long-range purpose of killing the President, that Jack Ruby knew Oswald before he killed him, or that either of them knew Officer Tippit.

There is no evidence, in short, that Oswald was more than a man alone — a sorely disturbed person whose need for recognition, at any price, festered under his own terrible inability to attune himself to his fellow man.

President Johnson phoned me at home one night, a week after the assassination, to ask me to serve on the commission. Probably every member protested the pressure of work, as I did, and doubtless the President answered them much as he did me: "That's what they all say, Jerry." Of course I accepted.

At the outset, we broke the investigation down into these areas: the assassination itself — the President's trip to Dallas, the actual shooting and the events before and after; Oswald's movements before and after the assassination, ending in his capture and then in his own murder; Oswald's back-

ground, from birth to death; details of Oswald's trip to Russia; details of his murder by Ruby and the possibility of prior association with Ruby, and, finally, the problem of security measures to protect future presidents.

Our chief counsel was Lee Rankin, Solicitor General in the Eisenhower administration. He picked a handful of skilled men to work directly under him. From the start we felt it was important that a strong part of our staff come from outside the ranks of government, and to this end we selected a dozen of the finest lawyers in the nation to serve as consultants. Most of them have worked nearly full time.

It would have been a bulky and time-consuming process to recruit our own investigators. Instead we elected to rely on the many agencies of government which already were involved: the FBI, Secret Service, State Department investigators, Treasury agents, Internal Revenue agents, and others. To back up our expert testimony on things like ballistics and handwriting, we tapped state and local agencies as well.

As the lines of the investigation emerged, we tried to backcheck each report to avert any softening of facts that might have occurred due to any agency's policy or position in relation to the assassination. Each of the endless rumors that spread like so many oil slicks had to be traced to its origin; depositions had to be taken and witnesses called.

Before we began any of our own investigations, we had to digest the massive reports which the federal agencies had gathered in the days immediately after the President's death as well as the reports of the Texas authorities. Then we plunged into the voluminous task of examining the people who were, in one way or another, involved by chance or association.

This brought before us an unusual cast of characters.

There was the mother, Mrs. Marguerite Oswald, a singularly angry woman whose strange attitudes and actions provided an appropriate background for the strange son she had shaped. Mrs. Oswald's irrational allegations gave rise to one of the most persistent and dangerous — and completely untrue — rumors: that Lee Harvey Oswald was, or had been, an agent of the U.S. government.

There was, also, Oswald's handsome Russian wife, a quiet young woman who at first seemed simple and direct and eager to co-operate — but who, as time went on and conflicts began to develop in her testimony, emerged as a complex and even mysterious person.

There was Robert Oswald, the brother, who came out of his erratic childhood passionately desiring stability, a solid and hardworking man whom Lee seemed somehow to have loved and yet held in sharp contempt for just these traits.

There was Jack Ruby, a sad and strange little man in the Dallas County jail who had killed the only man in the world who could have said with certainty just what happened.

And finally we came to know Lee Harvey Oswald himself, as well as any obscure man can be known after he is dead — particularly after he has spent

a critical two-plus years of his life behind the Iron Curtain.

When Oswald was coming home from Russia, he toyed with the thought of writing a book. As a beginning, he jotted down a foreword. That scrap of paper, filled with misspellings, survives in the commission files: "Lee Harvey Oswald was born in Oct 1939 in New Orleans La. the son of a Insurance Salesman whose early death left a far mean streak of indepenence brought on by neglect. . ."

The full details of Oswald's nearly three years in the U.S.S.R. will remain covered in mystery until and unless the Soviet government opens its files completely. It has not done so yet. Just after President Kennedy was killed, the Soviet government, perhaps realizing that its position was equivocal because of Oswald's background, rather dramatically handed over certain files to U.S. authorities. The information was of little value, and thereafter the Russians answered our additional questions with bare minimums of information.

But it did become unmistakably clear that never in his life — here, in Russia, or anywhere else — was Lee Oswald satisfied with the environment in which he found himself. When he returned to the U.S., this same discontent quickly overtook him and he began to look to Cuba as the place where his worth might be recognized and his shadowy philosophical theories might finally come to fruit. For, from the time he was 15, I believe his faith in Communism and the writings of Karl Marx as he understood them was one of the main motivating forces of his life.

Only a few weeks before the assassination, Oswald visited the Cuban and Soviet consulates in Mexico City to arrange entry to Cuba. Both consulates largely ignored him. It was a time of crushing frustration for Oswald. We have in our commission files a violent letter of complaint sent to the Soviet embassy in Washington, implying that the petty bureaucrats in the consulates in Mexico did not seem to realize who Lee Oswald was or the importance of what he was doing.

Before he went to Mexico City, Oswald had told his wife, "I'll be premier in 20 years." Now he came home, nearly broke, dejected, unwanted.

As always, there was not a single meaningful relationship between Oswald and any other human being.

There was no solace at home. As Marina Oswald's testimony developed, it was obvious that their life together had been stormy. He lived away from home much of the time. In the last year of his life, he was bringing to a peak his growing capacity for violence and his deep, overpowering hatred of authority.

A week before the assassination, Oswald had a bitter argument with his wife. When he came home on the Thursday night before the Friday on which he shot President Kennedy, Marina believed he had come to make up, but she did not permit the reconciliation. In fact, he had come home to get his rifle. He left the next morning before anyone else was up.

Mrs. Oswald was to see her husband just once more. He was in the Dallas city jail and he told her simply that everything would be alright.

Marina Oswald was the first witness we called. She appeared in a neat blue dress with light touches of make-up. Her manner was subdued. When she was

asked to identify her husband's clothing, she broke down, and the Chief Justice, in his gentle way, soothed her back to composure. By far the most poignant part of her testimony was her description of the afternoon of the assassination.

Marina said that when she and Mrs. Ruth Paine, the woman in whose house she lived, heard the news of the President's murder, "We both turned pale. I went to my room and cried." Later Marina testified, Mrs. Paine said, "By the way, they fired from the building where Lee is working."

Mrs. Oswald continued: "My heart stopped. I went to the garage to see if the rifle was still there and I saw that the blanket (in which Oswald normally kept it wrapped) was still there, and I said, 'Thank God.'"

She did not then look inside the blanket, which appeared undisturbed. When the police arrived and asked if her husband had a rifle, she led them to the garage. She thought, "Well, now they'll find it." One of the officers put a hand under the blanket and lifted and it folded over his hand. It was empty.

This was an intensely dramatic moment in Marina Oswald's testimony. There was a look of complete distress on her face. "Of course," she said, "I already knew that it was Lee."

Oswald's mother was the next witness. She appeared in a black dress and at the time I noted on a pad that she was: "aggressive, dogmatic, difficult." She told wild stories, frequently forgot her point, meandered through blind and unproductive asides. When we tried to get her back on the track, she denounced us for interrupting.

But Marguerite Oswald's widely publicized "secret agent" theory was traceable in the tangled lines of her testimony. She never accepted the fact that her son had simply taken off to Russia, leaving her destitute. Instead, she decided that he must have been sent to Russia on a secret mission for our government. Since her need was indeed genuine, she went to Washington to demand of various officials that her son be recalled to the U.S. so that he could support her. She had even tried to get into the White House to petition President Kennedy.

Within two months of this, she had received a letter from Lee, in which he indicated he would soon be trying to come home. She took this for confirmation that her demands on government officials had prevailed. After the assassination, she simply revived her belief that he was an agent and told everyone who would listen that this had been the case.

The result was a massive search by the commission to prove or disprove the secret agent theory. First we took the sworn denials of the directors of various agencies in Washington — men like J. Edgar Hoover and Secretary of State Dean Rusk. We quizzed personnel from the U.S. embassy in Moscow. We sent our own men into the agencies involved to study their old personnel files.

We were, and we are now, convinced that Oswald was never an agent for the U.S. government.

We interrogated Jack Ruby in an austere little jury room which had a sink at one end, and a long narrow table around which we all sat. Ruby wore sandals and a white jumper with several buttons un-

done. Though he told us no more than he claimed at his trial — that he had been moved only by his horror at the assassination — it seemed to be touch-and-go whether we could keep his nerves from exploding. He was terribly tense and, at one point, balked completely. Suddenly Sheriff Bill Decker of Dallas roared at Ruby, "Now be a man with a bunch of men that have come a long way to give you an opportunity to (talk)."

I was afraid that would blow everything up — but instead, Ruby began talking again. From this and other sessions, and from total examination of the lives of both Ruby and Oswald, we were convinced there was no prior relationship between Ruby and Oswald.

There were several trips to Dallas and on one of these the staff conducted an extraordinary experiment. It actually recreated the assassination, taking a similar car through a foot-by-foot re-enactment of what had happened. The restaging was based on three strips of movie film of the actual event, plus a variety of still photographs.

By making a triangulation with surveyor's transits located at the precise point at which each photographer had been standing, we were able to place the car exactly at each step.

A man of John Kennedy's approximate build rode in the President's seat. On the jump seat in front of him, just where Governor Connally had sat, was another stand-in wearing the actual coat Connally had worn on that day, the bullet hole outlined in chalk.

The rifle Oswald had used was mounted in the window which he had fired, and a camera was fitted to its telescopic sight. The car was taken foot-by-foot down the sloping road and photographed again at each point in its passage. By coordinating these photos and from a very close study of the evidence, the commission was able to conclude with certainty that there were three shots.

I personally believe that one of these three shots missed entirely — but which of the three may never be known. I believe that another struck the President in the back and emerged from his throat, and that this same bullet struck Governor Connally in the back and emerged from his chest, then went through his right hand and pierced his left thigh.

Governor Connally does not agree with this. He thinks the first bullet struck the President, the second hit him alone, and the third struck the President's head. Nevertheless, it is frequently true that a wounded man does not know immediately when he had been hit. I think that Governor Connally did not know for an instant or two that he himself was wounded as well as the President.

Certainly there is no question that a following bullet finally killed President Kennedy, inflicting a massive head wound. From the moment that bullet struck, there was no question of a chance for survival. In effect, the President was dead at that moment.

As we proceeded through experiment, investigation and testimony, we came to feel more and more confident of our facts. But the matter could not be considered finished until each of the hundreds of rumors was run to ground.

There were, for instance, the tales emanating from a crowd picture that included one Billy Lovelady, a youthful employe of the Depository. At the moment the President was shot, Lovelady was standing with a group of fellow employes at the Depository's front entrance. One of the pictures taken at the time of the assassination showed him in the background. When blown up, the grainy image bore a suprising resemblance to Lee Oswald.

This provoked a storm of rumor here and abroad. Major newspapers ran the picture and asked how, if there was a possibility that this was Oswald, it could be said that Oswald had himself fired the shots. Did not this give credence to the theories that there were other gunmen, who were upstairs while Oswald was down? Or to the theory that Oswald was the wrong man?

The doubt was compounded by Lovelady's own action. He virtually went into seclusion, refusing to talk with reporters or to allow his picture to be made. It is hard to blame him. Immediately after the assassination there was an almost tangible aura of fear in Dallas. Even important officials could not be sure in the first hours that a major plot was not underway. (H.L. Brennan, who actually saw Oswald shoot the President and provided the first description, decided soon afterward that his own life was in critical danger. At a police lineup, he later told us, he recognized Oswald immediately but feared to admit it. Later, after much hesitation, he made the identification despite the feared consequences.)

The commission questioned Lovelady, and in the absence of publicity he identified himself in the picture immediately, saying he had been standing precisely at that spot. Several other employes testified that they had been there with him. The Depository manager agreed that the picture plainly was of Lovelady, not Oswald. And that was all there was to that.

Then there was the rumor that there had been a sheriff's office alert of trouble at the Depository at 12:25 p.m. on Nov. 22 — five minutes before the assassination. Did that mean someone knew in advance there would be trouble? Was this not evidence of a plot?

We checked the records of the Dallas County sheriff's dispatcher desk and found that the call, tape-recorded and time-keyed, had been issued at 12:30 p.m., just after the shots were fired.

The "second rifle" also touched off misleading talk. The weapon which killed President Kennedy was a Mannlicher-Carcano rifle; it was made in Italy. Oswald purchased it secondhand.

But an early report had quoted police as saying the rifle was a Mauser, which is made in Germany. The two rifles bear only slight resemblance. Result: more public confusion — except among subscribers to the "conspiracy" theories, for whom it was further proof of more than one gunman. When police insisted that there had been just the one Italian rifle, it seemed to many that they were trying to hide something.

We had to go back to the afternoon of the assassination to set this rumor straight. When Oswald fled the sixth floor of the Depository, he had thrust the rifle behind a stack of boxes. It was found by the first investigating officers and a

guard was put over it until the weapons and fingerprint men arrived.

A reporter, facing an immediate deadline, asked an officer standing nearby what make the rifle might be. He said he thought it might be a Mauser. The reporter filed his story, calling the gun a Mauser, and the description was relayed around the world. Although it was followed by a correction, the error stirred up wide suspicions.

Perhaps the most rumor-ridden subject of all was the direction from which the shots were fired. Many people found it difficult to believe that anyone but a superb marksman could have fired three shots so quickly and so accurately. Our tests indicated, however, that this was not a remarkable feat.

There also are those who insist that Oswald, in the time available to him, could not have got from the sixth floor of the Depository to the second, where he was observed moments after the shooting. I ran down those steps myself, stopwatch in hand. There was time for him to make it.

There were also some cruel happenstances that day which broke in Oswald's favor. Several carpenters had been working on the sixth floor, laying a new plywood floor. At lunchtime they all went downstairs. Had they stayed on the stairs while eating, Oswald would have been denied his concealment.

Another young employe actually did eat his lunch on the sixth floor that day. He left a few chicken bones, which at first had been thought to have been Oswald's lunch. Had this employe stayed to watch the parade from the sixth floor, Oswald might have been thwarted. Instead, he joined two others on the fifth floor, at windows directly underneath the point where Oswald installed himself and waited for the President to appear.

And so the three men heard the shots fired, the ejector mechanism working, the shells hitting the floor just over their heads. The reverberations dislodged plaster that sifted down into their hair. Subsequently, their eerie testimony pinpointed the rifle shots.

When I was in Dallas, I stood in that same place while an investigator worked a rifle on the floor above. I too could hear the ejected shells hitting the floor.

Perhaps because of early confused reports on the President's wounds, there have been persistent rumors, too, that a second gunman — or even the only gunman — was near the railroad overpass which overlooks the scene of the assassination.

But from 10 a.m. that day, the overpass had been sealed off by Dallas Patrolman J.W. Foster to all but railway employes. A railroad towerman could see the whole area. He saw no strangers in the yard. When the motorcade appeared, the handful of spectators on the overpass clustered to the railing. Foster stationed himself slightly behind them and all were within his range of vision.

When the shots were fired, Foster thought immediately that they came from the area of the Depository. Others present had a variety of other theories, which were subsequently advanced to reporters. The towerman, as an example, couldn't be sure whether they came from the Depository or the overpass: he said he had noted in the past that, because of the

echoes in the area, noises originating from either place tend to sound the same.

In any event, no one present at the time saw anything at all suspicious.

Thus we came, gradually and finally, to the end of our assignment. We had become masters of much more information than we had expected to gather, veterans of many more twisting trails than we had expected to follow. We spent nearly two months writing our massive report — on which all of us, with our different backgrounds, are agreed.

This report is the truth as we see it, as best we know it, and on this, we rest. ☐

HOUSE SELECT COMMITTEE ON ASSASSINATIONS: MEMBERSHIP

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The 12 members of the newly formed House Select Committee on Assassinations (in alphabetical sequence) are:

U.S. Rep. Yvonne B. Burke (D.-Calif.)
336 Cannon H.O.B. — 202-225-7084

U.S. Rep. Samuel L. Devine (R.-Ohio)
2206 Rayburn H.O.B. — 225-5355

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1524 Longworth H.O.B. — 225-4806

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guilt; but if they proved a man could not have gone down to the second floor in time, they could prove Oswald's innocence.

In the first test run by the Commission it took a stand-in for Truly/Baker 1:30 and a stand-in for Oswald 1:18. In the second test run it took Truly/Baker 1:15 and Oswald 1:14. If you take the Oswald test time of 1:18, and the Truly/Baker time of 1:15, then Oswald would have arrived after Baker. If you add the time needed for the hypothetical assassin to leave his boxed-in "sniper's nest," hide the rifle, etc. he probably would have arrived 5 or more seconds after Baker. /8/ It is also inter-

A Radical Analysis of Political Assassinations and Conspiracies Is Needed

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To the Editor:

"Truth is always revolutionary": this is a golden rule in political analysis.

1. Reasonableness not Exaggeration. When we examine political assassinations and government conspiracies, we must not exaggerate the facts of these atrocities. A careful, well-documented presentation can speak for itself. When we inflate corporate/government conspiracies, we undermine our own efforts towards radical change.

2. The Nature of the System. We must examine the nature of the system itself. It is a pitfall to paint a picture of well-oiled conspiracies that mar an otherwise decent system. We must look at the day to day horrors of the system: rats in the ghetto, speed-up on the factory line and inadequate food and health-care for hundreds of thousands. We must look at our economy that is so heavily dependent on arms and munitions manufacturing.

3. Not CABALS but a SYSTEM. When we consider the failure of the established media to examine and reveal the truths of political assassinations, we should not be lulled into believing it is simply the work of the CIA or other cabal. We must recognize that the media monopolies have a vested interest in the stability and affirmation of the system — something that could be threatened in exposing conspiracies and cover-ups.

4. The Kennedys Support the System. We must be cautious not to represent the Kennedys as innocent victims. We should remember their complicity in war, counter-insurgency and cover-ups. The Kennedy silence on the assassinations of RFK and JFK is not necessarily the result of having been misled or blackmailed. It could be attributed to "reasons of state" and concern for the stability of the system.

5. Imperialism. The approach of radical researchers and "counterspies" should stem from the conviction that the system is basically imperialistic. Years of careful research and unhysterical explanations will be required to expose the monster, the system, which runs for the benefit and wealth of the few rich and for the harm and the oppression of the many poor. ☐

esting to note that Victoria Adams ran down the same stairs allegedly used by Oswald after the assassination and saw no one. /9/ Needless to say, the Commission's tests failed to prove that Oswald could have dashed down the stairs in time to meet Baker.

(To be continued in the next issue)